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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0944  
INFO RUEHZN/ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5363  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7906  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 7796  
RUEHGZ/AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU 9402  
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 6571  
RUEHGH/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 0220  
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0945  
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHDC  
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STATE FOR OES/IHA; HHS FOR ERIKA ELVANDER

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TAGS: [AMED](#) [TBIO](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: SARS BREAKTHROUGH--LUNG STEM CELLS KEY TO FINDING  
CURE

REF: 05 TAIPEI 02575

1. (U) SUMMARY: Taiwan medical researchers have demonstrated the existence of lung stem cells and identified them as a critical target for infection by the SARS virus. This research may result in a vaccine being developed to counter SARS. END SUMMARY

2. (U) John Yu is a US citizen researcher currently affiliated with the Genomics Research Center and the Institute of Cellular and Organism Biology of Academia Sinica (Taiwan's premier scientific research institute) told AIT that during the SARS outbreak of 2003 he observed that patients infected with SARS went into a peak infection period 10 days after contracting the disease, yet it took 3 weeks from initial contact before the lethal virus caused lung failure. According to Yu, the lag time is precisely the time needed for lung stem cells to grow new cells. SARS attacked the embryonic stem cells at this juncture and prevented the generation of new stem cells thereby dealing a knockout blow to some patient's ability to recover.

3. (U) Yu told AIT that before this discovery, lung failure was usually treated with anti-cancer medication. This treatment only addressed the symptoms but did not cure the underlying problem. His findings have been published in the authoritative Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences in Washington DC. Yu said that the next stage after the lung stem cell discovery is to try to grow enough of the stem cells so that a vaccine can be developed to counter SARS.

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